

By Mr. Pratt.

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At a Meeting of the DEPUTIES and DELEGATES from the PROTESTANT DISSENTERS of England and Wales, appointed to obtain the Repeal of the Test-Laws, at the King's-Head Tavern, in the Poultry, London, on the 30th Day of May, 1792:

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY,

THAT the Chairman be desired to sign the following Address, and that the same be printed.

*Address to the PROTESTANT DISSENTERS
of England and Wales.*

WE, the Deputies and Delegates from the Protestant Dissenters of England and Wales, appointed to obtain the Repeal of the Test-Laws, cannot adjourn our Meetings for this Year, without addressing our Constituents on the specific Object of our Appointment, and on other Objects which appear to us to be immediately connected with the general Interests of the Protestant Dissenters; to which the great Cause of religious Liberty is so closely united.

While we have endeavoured to promote the Union of Dissenters, upon the grand Principles which are common to them all, by expressing, in the most public Manner, a sympathetic Regard for our suffering Brethren at Birmingham, we have not been inattentive to the important Purpose for which we were constituted; we have wished again to agitate the Repeal of the Test-Laws, and to present a Claim so reasonable as ours to the Justice of a British House of Commons; nor should we have hesitated to improve even the slightest Appearance of a favourable Opportunity, knowing that the Cause of Reason and Justice cannot suffer by the severest Discussion: But, when we considered that the Flame of Bigotry, which lately ravaged one Part of the Kingdom, was not yet extinguished; and when we recollect the various Prejudices excited by Misrepresentations among our Countrymen at large, Prejudices which Time and a more just Observation alone can remove; we were convinced, that the Case of the Protestant Dissenters, respecting the Test-Laws, was not likely to gain an impartial Attention during the present Session of Parliament, and we are confirmed in this Opinion, by observing the ill Success of a wise and virtuous Attempt to rescue the Statute-Book of our Country from the Disgrace of Laws so oppressive and infamous, that, even in the Judgement of their Supporters, they ought never

never to be executed.—On this Occasion we cannot forbear to express our Alarms at the present Situation of religious Liberty in this County, and the precarious Tenure by which we all hold the invaluable Rights of Conscience ; for, though, of the Protestant Dissenters who lately joined in the Petition to the House of Commons for the Repeal of certain penal Laws, (which Repeal even our Enemies had formerly acknowledged to be necessary to render Toleration complete,) it may fairly be presumed, that many were Persons immediately obnoxious to the Severity of those Laws, yet we are persuaded, that our Brethren, of every theological Opinion, must feel an important Interest in this Question ; even the Christian, who believes the Doctrine which some of those Laws were designed to support, may tremble for the Existence of his religious Liberty, while it depends on an accidental Coincidence with the Faith of the established Church, and not on the unalienable Right of every Man to examine Religion freely, to form his own Opinions, and to diffuse them in the World with a Zeal proportioned to his Sense of their Importance.

To Claims, founded on a Right so sacred, Nothing has been opposed but the Plea of Expediency, an Argument weak in the Judgement of Reason, however formidable in the Hand of Power ; and we were sorry to observe this Argument offered by Persons who so lately declared, in the most public Manner, that every Man should be at Liberty to profess and to defend his religious Opinions ; and that this Liberty ought not to be solicited as a Matter of Favour, but demanded as an Act of Justice.

In Circumstances so serious, when even the lowest Idea of Toleration is abandoned, and while the Enemies of Dissenters are endeavouring to separate upon theological Questions, (Men who have other great Interests in common,) we feel it as a Duty we owe to our Constituents to press on their Attention the Necessity of an Union among themselves, and a cordial Intercourse with all the Friends of religious Liberty of every Description.

We have understood, with much Satisfaction, that our Brethren, in several Countries, have raised Subscriptions and appointed Committees to circulate *small Tracts in Support of religious Liberty*, and we earnestly recommend the Example to the Imitation of the Dissenters in general. As we believe that the Influence of Knowledge must at last be superior to all the Opposition of Ignorance and Prejudice, it will be our ardent Desire, under every present Discouragement, to scatter the Seeds of Instruction ; and, whether the Harvest arise in our Days or those of our Posterity, we cannot lose the Honour and the Satisfaction of having laboured in the Field.

And here we remark, with Pleasure, some Appearances favourable to our Cause, in the Spirit of Justice and Reason, manifested in the Writings of some distinguished Characters of the Church of England, and in the Sentiments publicly expressed by many respectable Members of both Houses of Parliament: At the same Time we are persuaded, that a considerable Number of Clergy and Laity in the established Church are equally desirous that the religious Community, to which they belong, may be delivered from such weak and disgraceful Supports as restricting Laws, which aggrandize one Body of Citizens at the Expence of another ; and penal Statutes

Statutes on Subjects of Religion, by which Man arrogates to himself the Prerogative of his Creator, and affects to say to the human Intellect, " Hitherto shalt thou go, but no farther."

While we contemplate those Appearances which inspire Hope amidst various Discouragements, and especially when we observe, that the *public Mind* is now directed to Questions of general Policy and Subjects most important to Man as a Member of Society, — we think the Period is advancing, when it will no longer be inquired, respecting the Candidate for civil Employment, what he believes on a theological Subject, but what are his Abilities for the Service of his Country.

Yet, however these Hopes may be disappointed, and our Possession of *just* and *equal Liberty* be deferred, we are now chiefly solicitous that our Rights may be generally understood, as an important Step towards the Attainment of them ; and that the *Protestant Dissenters*, who (like all Men that think for themselves) must be divided by a Variety of Opinions, may be ever united as the Friends of civil and religious Liberty, the firm Supporters of *just* Government, the Patrons of useful Knowledge, and the Benefactors of Mankind.

M. DODSON, Chairman.